

Compromise/Overcoming hostility

From B1

middle ground, not the ardent supporters or opponents of Amendment 2. And it would need money. That meant going to the business community.

"In Colorado Springs, if the business community doesn't want to do it, you might as well forget it," he said.

So Walta joined the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, and penciled in his first meeting: Dec. 11.

Across town, Digital Equipment Corp. didn't like the looks of Amendment 2 either. It went against the grain of a company that pays a manager a handsome salary to promote acceptance of diverse lifestyles in the working ranks.

The amendment's passage didn't change Digital's mind, it only sent its opposition underground. The company remained alert for others who wanted to reverse Amendment 2.

"The antennas were up," said Jack Kellogg, Digital's connection to the outside world. "We were looking for sources of energy."

He decided he'd ask around on at his next meeting at the chamber: Dec. 11.

That's where he met Greg Walta.

Walta was Kellogg's source of energy, and Kellogg was Walta's conduit to the city's big companies, the ones whose hiccups send ripples through the local economy. Twice in January Kellogg brought them together at Digital's offices for meetings with Walta.

In the meantime, Walta called up an old friend, Marvin Strait. Strait was the link to the smaller businesses in town, the backbone of Strait's accounting business.

Strait, a former chamber chairman, offered to talk up the idea among colleagues. He preached the Walta gospel at every chance: No discrimination, no special rights.

It sounded simple. Walta just didn't have it down on paper.

Former adversaries join forces to build coalition

Walta admits now that it was a naive idea.

Supporters of Amendment 2 had said they didn't want gays and lesbians to have special rights. Gays and lesbians said they didn't want special rights. The pro-2 forces said they didn't endorse discrimination. The anti-2 forces certainly didn't.

Walta wondered: *Isn't everyone saying the same thing?* Wouldn't both sides support a replacement that denies special rights and outlaws discrimination?

To find out, he went looking for a mediator, someone in a position of influence to get the two sides talking. He went where many others in the same position go: to Bill Hybl's office.

Hybl, chairman of the wealthy El Pomar Foundation, and Walta were adversaries once, when Hybl was in the District Attorney's Office and Walta was defending the accused. But on this day, Dec. 15, the two men agreed. Hybl said he shared Walta's "concern

about our community" and desire "to look for answers."

But Walta still didn't have a way to make his concept work. His first idea was to expand the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include gays and lesbians. He even called some contacts in then-President-elect Bill Clinton's transition team. But word came back that the White House would be too busy to pay much attention to something brewing out in Colorado.

So Walta changed his focus. On Dec. 29, he whipped up a brief memo containing the basic framework of his current plan: a direct repeal of Amendment 2, replaced by a ban on both discrimination and special rights. And it contained some basic exemptions, which would become the most problematic part of the proposal.

The same day, Walta paid a visit to Will Perkins at his Chrysler dealership. Kellogg came along as a show of corporate support. It was a loose and cordial two hours.

Before he left, Walta handed Perkins his memo. Perkins said he'd talk to the board members of Colorado for Family Values.

"He didn't say yes and he didn't say no," Kellogg said. Walta thought he had reason for hope.

A copy of the memo was faxed to the Colorado chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. Walta didn't know any gays or lesbians personally; he thought the ACLU would be attuned to their concerns. The word came back: No objections here.

A week into the new year, Walta was still waiting for a response from Perkins. He asked for a Jan. 18 meeting with him in Hybl's office, but Perkins remained noncommittal.

Still, Walta was feeling positive because of the ACLU's encouragement, and he began to exchange drafts of his measure with other lawyers. He met with the big-business crowd at Digital, bounced his ideas off listeners of Chuck Baker's radio talk show on KVOR, and in early February held a news conference outlining the basics of his proposal.

Several times a day Walta would mark up his draft and fax it out to a dozen or more lawyers in Colorado Springs and Denver. Specialists were getting into the act now: Tax lawyers made sure the amendment would exclude groups such as the Boy Scouts; labor lawyers tried to make compliance as painless as possible for employers. Sometimes they'd drop by at noon to work a few minutes and wolf down some sandwiches before heading back to their offices.

By now, Walta had written off Perkins. And on Feb. 8, Colorado for Family Values blasted the proposed replacement amendment as a "watered-down gay-rights bill," promising fierce opposition during the election campaign.

Walta realized he could not build a bridge between the two sides, but not just because of CFV. As he was discovering, gays and lesbians had serious problems with his idea, too.

Angry meetings produce a workable compromise

In late January, Walta invited Bruce Loeffler, a member of Ground Zero, a Colorado Springs group that promotes acceptance of minority lifestyles, to his office. Loeffler brought along Robin Miller, a Colorado Springs lawyer and lesbian activist.

Both Miller and Walta consider themselves civil rights activists. Both claim to be born-again Christians. Both don't like Amendment 2.

But Miller was hostile to Walta's idea from the start, especially the list of people and businesses that would be exempt from obeying the amendment. It included small employers, roommates, small apartments, churches and nonprofit groups.

"It was an angry meeting," Walta said. The two yelled at each other.

"You're a bigot," Miller snapped at one point.

"I was fighting for black people when you were too young to talk," Walta shot back.

Still, Miller was intrigued by Walta's concept — separating discrimination from "special rights" — and remembers the discussion ending well. "I came away trusting," she said. Walta remembers it differently: "I got the distinct impression as Robin left that she hoped I would drop off the face of the earth."

The gay and lesbian community was still confused and skeptical when Ground Zero met Feb. 7. Walta's plan had hit the papers, but few people in the group had seen it or Walta. They wanted a meeting with him the next day, one week before Walta planned to submit his initiative to the state for review.

A few dozen gays, lesbians and other interested folks were in the auditorium in Colorado College's Worner Center when Walta arrived at about 7 p.m.

Miller arrived during Walta's pitch. She had been reconsidering; although she felt Walta meant well, she aimed to kill his plan that night.

The argument quickly focused on Exemption 6. Walta insisted that Boy Scout troops and ham radio clubs not be forced to admit homosexuals. And he was adamant that the law be clear enough that those kinds of groups wouldn't need a lawyer to explain it to them. The trouble was that the simplicity of his language — Exemption 6 covered all nonprofit organizations — was more expansive than that.

Someone in the audience pointed out that Colorado College is nonprofit. Did Walta intend to let CC escape compliance with the amendment?

No, he said, but he didn't know how to write colleges out of the exemption without adding confusing language. And he wasn't going to sacrifice clarity.

"He just wasn't willing to give," Miller said later. "It was a replay of our first meeting." She urged everyone to reject the whole idea.

Walta was steaming, too. The meeting was about to collapse in frustration when an exasperated Miller blurted, "Greg, if you

See COMPROMISE/B7

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UPDATE

Finding middle ground

Amendment 2 compromise a battle

By Jeff Thomas
Gazette Telegraph

It was Feb. 27, a beautiful Saturday morning, and Greg Walta was sitting in his office, watching three months of work fall apart before his eyes.

In 48 hours he had to defend his proposal for a constitutional amendment to replace Amendment 2 in front of a bunch of nit-picking lawyers from the state.

Now here was Mary Celeste, a Denver lawyer and advocate of gay and lesbian issues, in Walta's face, telling him his proposal had gaping holes, that he must change it, and that she would work to defeat it unless he did.

Walta needed Celeste's support, but he was having none of her criticism.

"He was inflexible," Celeste said.

"We spent an hour barking at one another," Walta said.

John Huggins, director of Denver's economic development agency, and Randy Karsh, a Colorado Springs lawyer, sat at the far end of Walta's narrow office, saying nothing. They looked at each other; their eyes said *this is going nowhere*. They got up and walked out.

The barking stopped. Celeste followed Huggins and Karsh into a conference room next door. At least they would listen.

"Don't negotiate anything!" Walta yelled out the door behind them.

He stayed at his desk and fumed. Three months — *three months* — he had spent trying

to build a nearly impossible coalition — gays, lesbians, conservative Christians, Main Street shopkeepers and corporate suits — and these latecomers were going to water down and ruin his idea. In his own office!

Out of the wreckage comes a search for allies

Walta saw trouble in Amendment 2 before the election. It prohibits laws that classify gays and lesbians as protected, the same way racial minorities are. It forbids hiring quotas to benefit homosexuals. "Special rights" was the campaign term being used by Colorado for Family Values, sponsor of Amendment 2.

No problem there, Walta

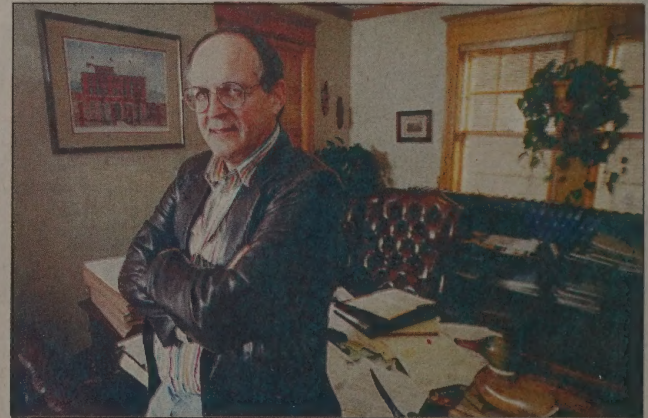
thought.

But lastly, the amendment also outlawed any "claim of discrimination" by gays and lesbians.

That's quite different from special rights, Walta thought. Special rights are quotas and affirmative action programs. It's not a special right, he thought, to cry foul if your boss fires you because you're gay.

Gay and lesbian groups, of course, picked up on that right away. They claimed Amendment 2 would make homosexuality a legal basis for denying jobs, housing and lodging.

Colorado for Family Values Chairman Will Perkins responded that it was "ridiculous" to think Amendment 2 would write discrimination into the constitution. The group didn't



Stuart Wong/Gazette Telegraph

Colorado Springs attorney Greg Walta has sought to end the fighting over Amendment 2 by offering a compromise that gives gays and lesbians no special rights but prohibits discrimination.

endorse discrimination, he said. Walta didn't understand. There were the words, "claim of discrimination," in black and white at the bottom of the amendment. "When I read it," he said, "I got the sensation of a slow train wreck happening."

Polls indicate that most folks are glad they approved Amendment 2, but Walta saw only the

wreckage: the recriminations, the drain on civic energy to fight off an effort by Amendment 2 opponents to brand Colorado Springs as an intolerant city. He turned his energy to finding a way to end the fighting.

But to have any chance of gaining credibility, he thought, a remedy must come from the

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CITY/REGION

Murder conspiracy charges filed against Fuqra members

Associated Press

New information linking two members of a Muslim group to a murder plot in Arizona and the 1984 bombing of a Hare Krishna Temple in Denver led to additional charges filed against the men Friday, officials said.

"We suspect that they were involved in the planning" of both crimes, Deputy Attorney General John Dailey said Friday.

Prosecutors filed a motion in state court to include a charge of conspiracy to commit murder against James Williams, 39, and Edward Flinton. Both men are members of the black Muslim group called "Fuqra," which was raided by authorities last fall.

The additional charge stems from a breakthrough during the review of thousands of pages of documents seized during the October raid on the compound near

Buena Vista.

Friday's charge comes in addition to a broader charge filed Feb. 26 that accused the two Fuqra members of violating state organized-crime laws through conspiracies to commit arson and murder, Dailey said.

Flinton is at large. Williams is one of four suspects already jailed in Colorado Springs on charges of workers compensation fraud.

Williams and Flinton are suspected of helping to plan the stabbing death of Muslim Imam Rashad Khalifa, leader of a Tucson mosque, on Jan. 30, 1990, Dailey said.

They also are suspected of involvement in planning the fire-bombing of a Hare Krishna temple in Denver on Aug. 1, 1989.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled March 15.

Springs woman shot in head early Friday dies of injuries

Gazette Telegraph

A Colorado Springs woman wounded in the head Friday in a mysterious shooting died Saturday.

Debra J. Bland, 37, was pronounced dead at about 1 p.m. at Memorial Hospital.

being held hostage by a woman with a gun, authorities said.

The officer backed away and called for both city and county police. Thirty minutes later, officers heard a shot, Duren ran out of the room, and Bland was

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